

## **Fund Families Enter into Spirit of Giving**

By Alexandra Russell, International Monetary Fund  
Wednesday, December 21 2012

*Toys donated at Children's Holiday Party to an organization helping homeless and immigrant families in Alexandria become a "double gift"—for the givers and recipients*

The 60 toys collected at the [International Monetary Fund's] Children's Holiday Party earlier this month were delivered to Community Lodgings, an organization that helps homeless and immigrant families in Alexandria, Virginia, through housing and education programs.



Community Lodgings operates 46 units of transitional and affordable housing for the formerly homeless or those at risk of homelessness. Its Fifer Family Learning Center (FLC) provides homework help, individualized instruction, and enrichment for at-risk children, and classes in computer literacy, English as a Second Language, and financial literacy for adults.

The toys donated by the Fund families will help fill the Family Learning Center's Christmas Store, where children can spend the "Community Lodging dollars" they've earned at the Center to buy gifts for their siblings, parents, and friends the week before Christmas. The children receive the Community Lodging dollars as rewards for trying their best in the FLC programs. Volunteers wrap and label the gifts and help the youngest children do their shopping.

### **A double gift**

"These are children who would not ever have an opportunity to buy a gift," said Bonnie Baxley, Executive Director of Community Lodgings. The donated toys are thus a "double gift," she explains, because they enable both the giver and the recipient to enjoy the holiday spirit of gift-giving.



Founded in 1987 by eight Alexandria churches, Community Lodgings serves mostly immigrant families. "In 2011, 54 homeless people were in our program," reported Baxley, "and given an apartment, employment counseling, therapy, education, mentoring, case management, and a real chance to succeed." During the year, she said, "of the 29 people who left our transitional housing programs, 25 are renting their own residence, independent of rental subsidies; a success rate of 86 percent."

The organization's Learning Center provides educational support to 108 children daily, 100 percent of whom passed all core academic courses. In 2011, staff spent 117 hours in conferences with parents and teachers on behalf of the children. The Catalogue of Philanthropy named

Community Lodgings as “one of the best small charities in the Greater Washington region.”

**Donations needed**

Community Lodgings has issued a Christmas appeal for additional contributions: \$25 pays for five hours of instruction for one child; \$50 buys two textbooks for children; \$100 supports one job training workshop for a homeless adult; \$250 pays for one month of childcare for homeless parents while they work; \$500 covers the cost of one month of enrichment activities for the youth programs; and \$1,000 pays for one month of Transitional Housing Programs for two homeless people. To donate, visit <http://communitylodgings.org/donate-now/>.

The organization also has numerous opportunities for volunteers who would like to contribute their time. They include teaching English as a second language to low-income adults, mentoring at-risk schoolchildren, reading aloud to toddlers and young children while their parents are in class, mentoring adults in basic financial management skills, and tutoring elementary and middle school children after school. To volunteer, sign up at <http://communitylodgings.org/volunteer/>.

“We’re very grateful to the Fund for the continued support over the years. We invite you to plan a visit to see our programs and please keep us in mind if anyone you know is seeking volunteer opportunities, as we can always use more help,” said Baxley.

###